

GLC 63
CAMERON

WRITINGS

LETTER TO THE EDITOR Regarding
John Carman [1994]

[2 pages]

1/38

Letter to the Editor:

My mildest description for Carman's review of "The Native Americans" is simplistic. John Carman's malodorous review (10 Oct.) of the six hour TBS series, "The Native Americans" was filled with his barely under the surface hatred of Native Americans. He skidded close to calling us bloodthirsty and heavily emphasized the view that we as Native people are ungrateful children for the wondrous European contributions to our cultures. Afterall, without the "European contributions", we would still be heathens; uncivilized burning, pillaging, abducting, raping, woman-hating, scalping, screaming, simple-minded, immobile savages who exist solely to satisfy our inherent bloodlust for one another. Carman found an outlet for his pent up racism.

John Carman, donned his journalistic cavalry shirt, following in the footsteps of predecessor journalists from the 1800's who wrote with closely related sentiments to his, only replace the prairie with the television. They also perpetuated demonistic images and conjured as much fear and hatred of Native people as possible.

Carman's insecurity and defensiveness is rampant throughout the article. He derides Native cultures through wearisome sarcasm while pretending to acknowledge that *perhaps* there is some truth to our experiences. Even that is couched in a context reminiscent of those who claim that the holocaust against Jews in Germany was fabricated.

His column is a fallacy perpetuating the lie that We as Native People believe we are superior to everyone who is not. The truth is that I am Lakota and we are superior to everyone who is not! The real message hammered daily, is that if you are an American Indian, you are inferior. I know from my childhood experiences about being waited on last even though I was first in line at the drugstore in the white town near my reservation or being refused Halloween treats because the white woman discovered that I was an Indian girl.

There are over 500 Native Nations and tribes. Carman presumes knowledge about the minutia and depth of our traditional beliefs in his mindless proclamations. Carman backhandedly implies that sexism was rampant in Native cultures. That implication is Carman's convoluted, snaky message about how he thinks Indian women are viewed by our own people. But it reveals his view of Indian women evoking generally accepted images of Indian women as "squaws", subservient, stupid, sexual beings. Carman also, again backhandedly, proffers that "bloodlust" was peculiar to Native people. He overlooks the fact that scalping was originated by the Dutch. The "settlers" received payment for scalps and body parts. This ethnic cleansing emptied the lands so the "notion of private property", Carman's sacred sacrament, could begin its unholy devastation.

I am not surprised that Carman finds the segment on the Great Plains "generally engaging" since Nations and tribes from those regions fulfill the whiteman's fantasy and romantic images of American Indians. The buffalo and feathered Lakota have been grist for Hollywood movies. Carman enjoys the touch of "lyricism" when Native music is added. This benign feature also fulfills another stereotype of Native people as being childlike. And the entertainment value of the violence of the buffalo kill probably appealed to him.

Then he drops his bombshell! - "the series was produced by American Indians." I rushed to my trusty sidekick, TV Guide, and found that during the week beginning 1 October 1994, there were 11 white-man-versus-Indian type movies, totaling 23 hours. In the week beginning 8 October, 25 hours of Indians-on-the-warpath-abducts-white-girl-white-man-raised-by-Apaches-attacking-all-those-pacifist-setters were listed. Additionally F Troop was broadcast on the Nickolodeon channel almost every week night. (That sitcom portrays Native people as buffoons in grotesque caricatures.) These movies and sitcom were definitely not produced by American Indians. Carman considers these hours of weekly television movies perpetuating stereotypes of Native Americans and certainly sanitizing history as merely "movie dust-ups." Carman can rest assured that the Native point of view does not despoil his television at any time of the year.

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Carman attacks the efforts of Ted Turner and the obvious contradiction of his ownership of land in Montana. Costnering of Native people is always a danger when the ultimate control of these productions is in the hands of non Native producers. Carman inserts the issue of the Turner Entertainment ownership of films. Again, Carman dismisses Native cultural beliefs about private property with this odd comparison. The question of ownership of films is not on the same moral level as the holocaust committed in this country against Native people to satisfy goldlust and to steal land. As the Cowboys'quarterback Aikman says in a television commercial, "get real."

Carman sarcastically states that " only one positive European contribution to Indian life is acknowledged - the horse. But when our American Indian series hosts get together and mull that over, they're not so sure about horses, either. Too much mobility is bad for indigenous cultures." The Native people who were discussing the horse were acknowledging that it changed aspects of our cultures. The horse was recognized in the series as a great gift but the hosts also noted that its arrival was a historical marker for the introduction of guns, alcohol and disease into Native cultures. White environmentalists routinely question the use of automobiles. Does this questioning make mobility bad for white cultures? It was astounding that Carman so grossly lied about this segment to fit his personal agenda.

Native people have been engaging in an ongoing two century old battle for survival of our lives, our cultures, our religion. Fighting the legacies of the persecution of our people; alcoholism, the worst health status of any racial group in the US, the lowest on the poverty index, the highest suicide rate of any group, the lowest birth rate survival, an average lifespan of 45 years. We are the only racial group in the US that is preyed upon by anyone who claims to have a greatgrandmother who is Indian, then becomes an Indian and then exploits that status by getting jobs as Native Americans. We have been otherwise preoccupied with these matters to consider positive European contributions to our lives.

Carman decries the series as flawed because it was produced by Native people and therefore expresses an illegitimate perspective. He was incapable of not succumbing to his vile bias toward us. The Chronicle allowed him to further adumbrate the truth of our history. It is deplorable that the Chronicle allowed Carman's marauding, vitriolic band of words to be published. The series demanded an intelligent reviewer with at least some gift for writing. (His overuse of dull sarcasm is evidence of an incredibly lazy writer.) It certainly required that the reviewer not grossly misrepresent the words of our people by egregiously inserting his personal dreck.

My grandfather, as a young man, escaped from the Catholic missionary school during a harsh South Dakota winter, almost freezing to death. My grandmother was forced to scrub the floors of that school by the nuns because she dared to speak Lakota. I strongly resent that their lives and thousands of other Native people were treated so contemptuously.

Carman is correct about one thing, too much mobility is bad for indigenous cultures. The vast immigration to our country, this mobility, was definitely bad for our cultures, especially bad for the Nations and tribes that are now extinct.

If Oliver North can get elected to the US Senate, then I guess it's understandable that John Carman can write a daily column. Ah, the wondrous legacies of European contributions.

Sincerely,

Barbara M. Cameron
(Hunkpapa Lakota)

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John Cameron [1944]

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